DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 027 PS 025 678

AUTHOR Schwartz, Shari S.
TITLE Focus on First Graders.
INSTITUTION El Paso Independent School District, Tex.
PUB DATE Sep 96
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
LANGUAGE English, Spanish
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; Behavior Problems; *Early Intervention; Elementary School Students; Grade Repetition; *Grade 1; *High Risk Students; Low Income; Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Parenting Skills; Primary Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *School Community Relationship; Special Needs Students
IDENTIFIERS El Paso Independent School District TX; Texas (El Paso)

ABSTRACT

The result of a collaboration between the El Paso, Texas, school district and community agencies, the Focus on First Graders program provides early intervention and prevention using a comprehensive approach to providing a variety of services at the school to at-risk first graders from low income families. Teachers and parents were surveyed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Specific elements of the program were assessed, including Family Intervention, agency counseling, tutoring, Learning Trolley, and parenting classes. Teachers indicated that most of them knew of the program and indicated benefits students received from each program element, training that could be included in the program, and suggestions for greater program effectiveness. Success stories about students who benefited from the program were also provided. Teachers also rated how much particular students had improved on a variety of problem indicators; results suggest that some improvement was seen in at least 70 percent of the students on nearly all behaviors. Results also indicate that retention rates have dropped in schools using the intervention program. The 63 parents who responded to the program effectiveness survey indicated that the program had helped them understand and work better with their children, that staff had been helpful, and that the program had increased their involvement in their children's education. A pamphlet, "Focus on First Graders: Strengthening First Graders and Their Families - En foque En los ninos de primer ano" (in English and Spanish) is included. (JPB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 410 027

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Shari S.
Schwartz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 025678

SEPTEMBER 1996

El Paso Independent School District

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

El Paso Independent School District

Mission Statement

The mission of the El Paso Independent School District is to meet the diverse needs of all students and empower them to become successful members of a global community.

Goals

1. **Increase the educational achievement of all students to establish a foundation for future success.**
2. **Support effective organizational structure and interactions that ensure positive and efficient operation of the district.**
3. **Provide a safe and supportive environment so that all students and personnel can be productive.**
4. **Expand opportunities for parents, business, community, and schools to work together to improve education.**

Board of Trustees

President, Sergio Lewis
Vice-President, Barbara Forester Coleman
Secretary, Kathy Becker
Carlos Cordova
Sal Mena, Jr.
Dr. Charles Roark
Richard Telles

Superintendent's Leadership Council

Superintendent

Dr. Stan Paz

Associate Superintendents

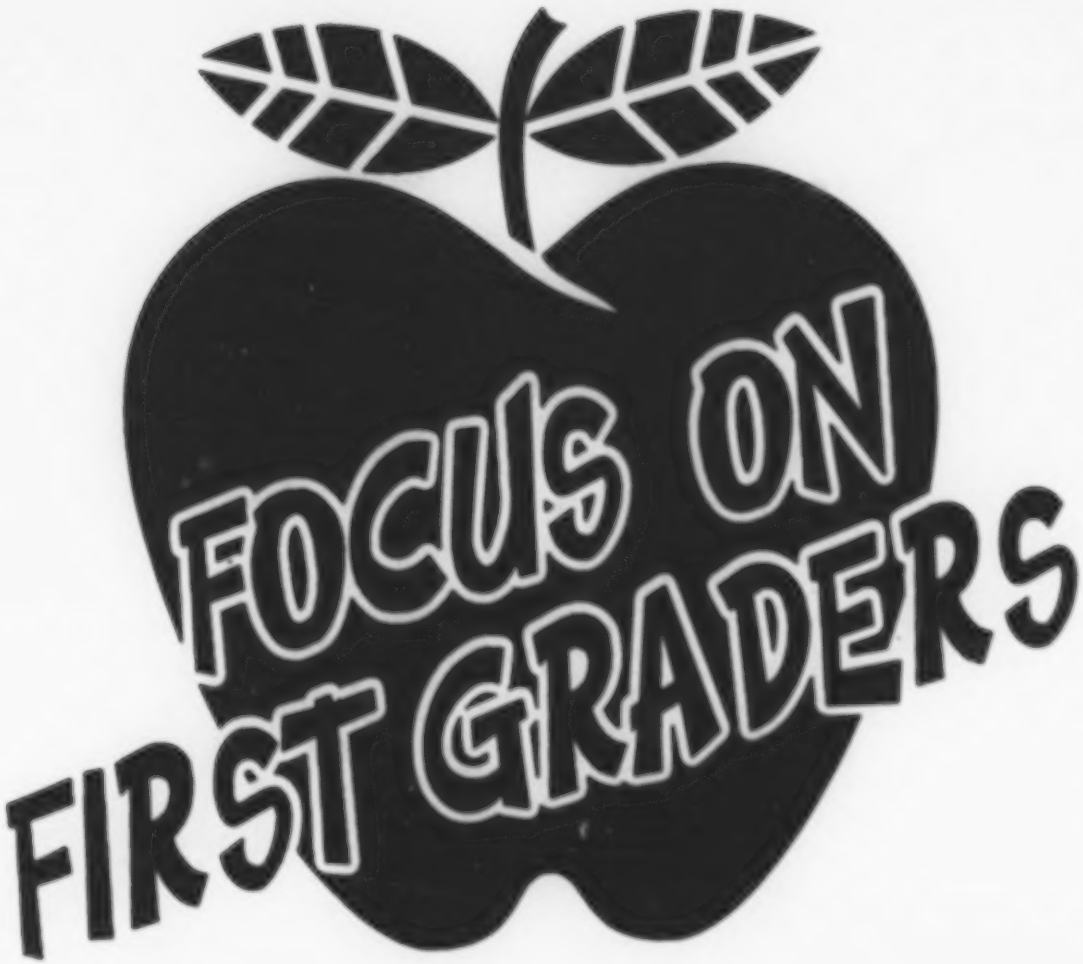
Kenneth R. George, Schools
Dr. Yolanda M. Rey, Education
John W. Whitaker, Operations

Assistant Superintendents

Luis C. Cortés, Middle Schools
Dr. Charlotte Craigo, Elementary Schools
Jose F. Ontiveros, Human Resources

Executive Directors

Kevin Allred, Finance, Budget and Accounting
Joanne Foster, Program Development and Support
Kari Hutchison, Communications and Business Partnerships
Dr. Margaret Johnson, Special Populations and Programs
Jack Johnston, Interim, Technology and Information Systems
Olga Jorjorian, Alternative Programs and Student Services
Lorene S. Patneaude, Staff Development
Dr. Rodolfo Rincones, Research and Evaluation
Ralph Yturralde, Employee Relations



SEPTEMBER 1996

El Paso Independent School District

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Focus on First Graders
1995-96

Program Description

The 1995-96 school year was the fourth year of implementation for the Focus on First Graders (FFG) program, located at Aoy, Bliss, Bradley, Johnson, Lee, Vilas and Wainwright. Focus on First Graders is an early intervention and prevention program which offers a wide range of services to at-risk and low-income students. Its primary goal is to help students be successful in the early primary grades, with emphasis on Grade 1. Students at each site are referred to the program if they are identified by their teacher as having severe academic and/or behavioral problems. Five important services are provided to these children and their families. They are listed below.

- Enrolling identified students in the school tutoring program
- Referring families to community agencies and resources that can help them address their physical, financial, medical and social needs
- Offering individual and family therapy by professionally licensed therapists who deal with the emotional and psychological issues of the child and family
- Providing parenting classes to help develop and enhance the nurturing capacity of parents and to increase their involvement with their child's education
- Providing two field trips each year for all first graders in the seven schools in order to enrich the students' limited view of their own city and community

Family Intervention Specialists

One of the key elements of this program is the Family Intervention Specialist. Two of the specialists are assigned to three schools each, serving the early primary grades; the third provides services to all students at Wainwright Elementary through the Wainwright Family Resource Center. Their responsibilities include the following:

- working with school personnel to coordinate psychological-social services for children and their families,
- serving as a mediator between parents and school personnel,
- working with parents and teachers to develop strategies for helping students succeed in school, and
- making regular home visits to see firsthand how the family is progressing and to determine additional needs.

The Family Intervention Specialists worked with approximately 244 families during the 1995-96 school year. The following table shows the kinds of services which were provided to families by the Family Intervention Specialists and shows how many times these services were provided.

Counts of Services Provided by Family Intervention Specialists 1995-96 School Year

Service Provided	Aoy	Bliss	Bradley	Johnson	Lee	Vilas	Wain-wright	Total
Referral for FFG Agency Counseling	147	143	20	41	101	18	52	**522**
Referral for other agency counseling	2	4	1	8	4	7	13	**39**
Conference with child or parents	217	196	68	178	144	59	188	**1,050**
Conference with teacher	202	233	5	84	226	22	105	**877**
Home visit	39	116	1	4	9	33	80	**282**
Conference with school personnel	166	79	19	58	158	15	117	**612**

Agency Counseling

Each year, FFG contracts with several community counseling agencies to provide the services of licensed therapists for students and families whose needs cannot be met by the Family Intervention Specialist. Counselors from cooperating agencies come to the school to meet with students and/or families. Students who need to be tested for ADD/ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder) or require other psychiatric services may be referred to other cooperating professionals who can provide those services. In 1995-96 the agencies/persons who provided contracted counseling for FFG were Catholic Counseling, the Child Guidance Center, Family Services of El Paso, Ilyana Jacobson (private practice), and Jewish Family and Children's Services. The table above shows that more than 500 referrals for counseling were made by the Family Intervention Specialists to FFG agencies in 1995-96. The table also shows that a few referrals were also made to agencies who had not contracted with the program.

Tutoring

Students with academic deficiencies who are referred to the program are placed into each school's tutoring program. Tutoring is provided four to five days a week during an enrichment period or after school. Tutors include parents,

community members, college students, or mentors from nearby high schools. Approximately 300 FFG students received tutoring during the 1995-96 school year.

Learning Trolley

The Learning Trolley was an innovative component which was sponsored by the Junior League during 1994-95 and 1995-96. (FFG funds and school moneys will be used to provide similar field trip experiences in 1996-97.) Twice a year, trolleys from the El Paso Trolley Company took students on field trips to sights like the El Paso Airport. At the airport, Southwest Airlines personnel hosted a tour which allowed the children to board a parked plane, hear about airline-related jobs, and receive small souvenirs. All first graders (more than 850 children) at the seven project schools went on two Learning Trolley trips in 1995-96.

Parenting Classes

Parenting classes were held at each campus throughout the year, involving a total of 225 parents. The curriculum was created in response to the special needs and requests of each campus. In the fall, ten sessions of "Niños Bien Educados" were offered at Wainwright by the El Paso Center for Prevention of Child Abuse. During the spring semester at Aoy, Lee and Vilas, the same agency covered special topics requested by parents.

The Region XIX Headstart Program held parenting classes jointly for Headstart parents and FFG children throughout the school year at Bliss, Bradley and Johnson. The facilitator used the Headstart Parenting Curriculum for eight weeks in the fall; different topics were presented in the spring.

Evaluation Data

Teacher Surveys

Two surveys were distributed to teachers. One survey was given to all first grade teachers at program sites to determine their awareness and opinions of the program. Another survey was given to teachers who had FFG students in their classes. These teachers were asked about the impact of the program on individual students. Sixty-six teachers completed this survey. Their responses indicate that most teachers were aware of the services provided by the program. Complete survey results are displayed on the following pages.

First Grade Teacher Survey

I am aware of the services provided to students and their families by the FFG Family Intervention Specialist.	YES	92%
	NO	8%

To what degree has the Family Intervention Specialist been effective in working with students and their families at your school?	Very Effective	50%
	Somewhat Effective	45%
	Not Effective	5%

To what degree has this program been helpful in improving communication between you and your students' parents?	Very Helpful	47%
	Somewhat Helpful	40%
	Not Helpful	13%

Open-Ended Questions

How have your students benefited from tutoring?

Teachers mentioned several benefits students received from tutoring: higher grades (27 teachers), individual attention (15 teachers), and increased confidence and self-esteem (9 teachers). Seven teachers made comments about how tutoring could be improved. Following are some sample quotes about tutoring.

"One student was not passing at the end of the second six weeks. Now he is getting B's and C's. He was a non-reader; now he is a reader.

"<Students> have improved in both reading and math and feel better about themselves."

"With one-to-one help their skills improved greatly."

"This has given them the confidence to perform in class."

"If we had more experienced tutors it would be more successful."

"There should be tutoring every day of the week. That would really help our students."

How have your students benefited from the Learning Trolley?

Teachers were very positive about the benefits of the Learning Trolley field trips. Forty-one teachers said that the trolley had provided exposure to new ideas and hands-on experiences for these at-risk first graders. Twenty-four teachers said the trolley increased vocabulary and ideas both for writing and for thematic units. The trips were not only academically valuable--eleven teachers talked about outcomes like increased self-esteem and students having fun and enjoying the experience.

> "It was a very exciting experience for some pupils because they had never been on a trolley or bus."
>
> "They had experiences to share and they got first-hand knowledge of places and careers they might have never experienced."
>
> "They all benefited wonderfully from the Learning Trolley. They think, write and talk about their trips all the time."
>
> "The field trips naturally develop into lessons and thematic units. The students were producing books, and drawing and writing on the experiences they had. Vocabulary was developed to the extent that even the teacher learned because of the research involved."

What training would you like to see included in Focus on First Graders?

The most commonly mentioned request for training involved preparation of tutors. Fourteen teachers asked for more/better training for tutors in areas like reading strategies, basics of behavior management, and developmental characteristics of young children. Nine teachers called for training for parents. Teachers suggested training for parents on topics such as helping with homework, using reading and math strategies, and how to be more involved with the school. Fourteen teachers asked for training on specific topics. Six of these requested training on dealing with ADD/ADHD students. The other eight mentioned a variety of topics including phonics, modifying for students with learning disabilities, classroom management, and strategies for reading, math, and language arts.

How could this program be more effective?

Responses involving tutoring were made by 18 teachers. Teachers suggested that tutors receive more training, that they begin working earlier in the year and that turnover be kept to a minimum.

Eight teachers requested increased communication among all parties including Family Intervention Specialists, parents and teachers. One teacher said,

"Teachers need to be notified at the beginning of the year if they have students who are tracked by this program. It was hit or miss that I found out who my students were." Another said, "<Periodically> have a conference with each teacher and update him/her on the work being done with each child."

Seven teachers mentioned the Family Intervention Specialists and/or school counselors. Five of these requested additional Family Intervention Specialists or counselors. Two of these teachers wanted program personnel to respond more quickly to problems.

Seven teachers would like to see more involvement from parents. One said, "My experience has been that FFG does all that they can to reach out and support the parents as well as their children. <What can be done> when parents reject this?"

Other suggestions included offering more field trips, extending the program to other grades, and making sure all teachers receive an orientation to the program.

If possible, please share a success story or anecdote about one of your students who has benefited from this program. (*Names have been changed.)

"Every single student is a success story because all of them have improved their grades. They read better, they understand what they read and they feel better about themselves."

"I had a child that was failing. He was placed in tutoring and the family also received counseling...This child is in third grade now. He placed first in the District Science Fair. Without the help of the program in first grade, I don't think this child would be as successful as he is today."

"Armando* is in my class this year as a repeater. Through the efforts of FFG he was tested and put on medication...He is a totally different child this year, and is doing great. Even the assistant principal commented on his behavior and reading ability..."

"Sammy's* mom needed to hear from other people besides the teacher that a problem existed....The FFG counselors have been very active with this mother and the mother feels that Sammy's* behavior has improved dramatically."

"John* has made a big turn-around since August. His behavior has improved and he's less aggressive and more willing to learn. The program really made a big difference in his life."

"At the beginning of the year Rosa* seemed extremely withdrawn and immature. Her attention span was limited and she did not seem to capture concepts...After tutoring, counseling and parenting classes for her mother, Rosa's grades are above average. She participates in class. She seems happy and confident."

Student Behavior Survey

The previous survey was sent to all first grade teachers at program schools, whether or not they had FFG students in their classes. A different survey was sent to teachers who had FFG students in their classes. These teachers received a survey for each FFG student who had received intensive services. Each survey contained a list of problem behaviors/attitudes. Teachers were asked to rate how much a particular student had improved on each of the problem indicators. Surveys were completed on 130 children. The survey results follow.

Problem Behaviors	% of Students Exhibiting Behavior Initially	% of Students Showing Improvement
Easily distracted	95%	81%
Has difficulty remaining seated	81%	72%
Often blurts out answers to questions	73%	69%
Doesn't complete tasks	93%	78%
Has difficulty playing quietly	71%	70%
Often talks excessively	71%	70%
Often interrupts others	72%	70%
Often loses things necessary for activities at home or at school	78%	70%
Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat	74%	70%
Has difficulty following directions	89%	65%
Non-verbal	70%	72%
Aggressive	64%	71%
Impulsive	70%	67%
Withdrawn	59%	69%
Interacts poorly with peers	80%	87%
Doesn't retain information	85%	70%

The survey results on the table above give an idea of the kinds of behaviors displayed by children who were referred to the program. The fairly high percentages in the column on the left indicate that a majority of the children had many problem behaviors. The column on the right shows that some improvement was seen in at least 70% of the students on nearly all of the behaviors.

Grade 1 Retentions

When the Focus on First Graders program was designed, one of its primary goals was to reduce retention rates in first grade in the project schools. The tables on the following page display retention rates for the seven program schools and for a group of similar schools used as a comparison group. (Each of the seven comparison schools was chosen to match a program school on the basis of similar characteristics like size, number of students in bilingual education, number of economically disadvantaged students, etc.)

PROGRAM SCHOOLS

	Total Grade 1 Retention Rate*					
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Aoy	16.9%	10.5%	7.4%	5.0%	7.3%	5.0%
Bliss	11.7%	15.3%	4.0%	5.6%	<1 %	1.6%
Bradley	7.8%	4.8%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Johnson	13.9%	11.9%	8.8%	9.2%	7.1%	0.0%
Lee	11.8%	11.8%	4.3%	3.5%	3.7%	1.3%
Vilas	14.9%	22.1%	2.5%	2.4%	5.1%	1.2%
Wainwright	13.7%	8.4%	13.3%	7.0%	11.7%	5.1%
Total	**13.1%**	**12.2%**	**6.2%**	**4.9%**	**5.0%**	**3.3%**

*Source: Promotion/Retention Reports, and unpublished data, Research and Evaluation

COMPARISON SCHOOLS

	Total Grade 1 Retention Rate*					
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Cooley	17.4%	10.0%	16.7%	10.8%	10.4%	8.7%
Fannin	8.6%	7.3%	3.0%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%
Hughey	7.3%	6.5%	2.4%	0.9%	4.7%	5.5%
Lamar	11.9%	13.3%	7.5%	9.9%	2.7%	2.3%
Roberts	16.8%	11.8%	8.3%	6.4%	8.7%	3.4%
Rusk	4.5%	4.9%	7.4%	8.7%	6.3%	1.3%
Stanton	5.2%	9.6%	5.0%	6.7%	<1 %	3.9%
Total	**10.3%**	**9.4%**	**7.6%**	**6.7%**	**5.2%**	**3.8%**

*Source: Promotion/Retention Reports, and unpublished data, Research and Evaluation

The tables show that retention rates have been declining for the past six years in both groups of schools. Until 1995, rates were declining faster at program schools. However, in the last two years, rates in the two groups have been about the same. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the degree to which the Focus on First Graders program has impacted these retention rates. Many other factors, including changes in principals and teaching staff, and other intervention programs like Reading Recovery, have undoubtedly also had an impact on retention statistics at these schools.

Parent Survey

A parent survey was distributed to 136 parents of FFG students. The survey was printed in English and in Spanish. Sixty-three of the recipients (46%) completed and returned the survey. Respondents were first asked which services they and/or their children had received. Seventy-one percent indicated that their child had received tutoring. The next most common response was some kind of social service or referral to an agency (62%). Sixty percent had received counseling through an FFG agency and 38% had attended parenting classes.

Parents were then asked to respond to eight questions about the effectiveness of the Focus on First Graders program. Their responses are displayed below.

Results of Parent Survey
N=63

	% Yes	% No
The services which I/we have received through Focus on First Graders have helped me to understand and work more effectively with my child.	93%	7%
This program has helped my child improve his/her grades in school.	84%	16%
Since receiving services from this program, I have seen positive changes in my son/daughter at **home**.	89%	11%
Since receiving services from this program, I have seen positive changes in my son/daughter at **school**.	89%	11%
The Focus on First Graders staff were available and willing to help when we needed assistance.	98%	2%
This program has helped me to become more involved in my child's education.	98%	2%
The services we have received have had a positive impact on our family.	92%	8%

The table shows that the parents who returned surveys responded very positively about the program. A high percentage (93%) indicated that the program had helped them to understand and work better with their child. Nearly all (98%) said the program staff had been available to help them; the same percentage said that the program had helped them become more involved in their child's education.

FOCUS ON FIRST GRADERS

El Paso Independent School District

14

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

Focus on First Graders is an early intervention and prevention program utilizing a comprehensive approach to providing at-risk and low income first graders and their families a variety of services at the most accessible site available – the school! It is a coalition of private and public agencies and volunteers who are committed to providing a wide range of family support services to first graders and their families in the El Paso Independent School District.

Statistics show that if a student is retained in the first grade, chances of him/her dropping out of school is high. If that student is retained once more, the drop out rate jumps to a 90% probability. This program aims to reduce retention rates by providing students and their families with a variety of services in order to establish a solid academic foundation in the child's early years of schooling.

Goals

Primary Grades

1. To increase student readiness, success, and self-esteem
2. Increase student and family access to necessary health care and social services
3. Strengthen the ability of families to provide the support their children need
4. Develop strong collaboratives among schools, businesses and the community
5. Reduce retention rates

Long Term Goal

By early identification, Focus on First Graders aims to maximize the number of high school graduates who are fully prepared to enter post secondary education, the competitive work force, or military service.

Services Provided

This program aims to reduce first-grade retention rates by providing students and families with a variety of social and tutorial services so that a successful academic foundation can be established in the child's first year of school.

1) Family Intervention Specialists refer family members to community agencies and resources to help them address their physical, financial, medical, and social needs.

2) Tutoring program to enhance academic performance.

3) Individual and family therapy by professionally licensed child therapists.

4) Parenting classes to enhance parenting skills and increase parental involvement with their child's education.

5) Enrichment field trips for all first graders at the Focus on First Graders' schools.

Summary

The significance of this program is the unique collaboration between the school district and community agencies in establishing a comprehensive, integrated system of social and educational services to assist children and families at the school site.

The educational value of Focus on First Graders is quite novel as it brings together existing community resources to impact the educational achievement of children. Providing families of at-risk children with the support services they need, enables them to provide their children with the support needed to obtain academic success. If families are at-risk themselves, as one in three El Paso families are, they will be less able to assume responsibility for their child's academic progress.

For more information please call:

Focus on First Graders
499 Cabaret
El Paso, Texas 79912
(915) 587-5707
(915) 581-0917 (Fax)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PS 025678

Enfoque En Los Niños De Primer Año

FO
A
DE
ES
A
SUS FAMILIAS

El Paso Independent School District

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introducción

Focus on First Graders (Enfoque en los Niños de Primer Año) es un programa adoptado por un grupo de agencias privadas, públicas y de voluntarios, todos comprometidos a ofrecer un amplio número de servicios para apoyar a las familias de niños que estén a riesgo de reprobar el primer año en alguna de las escuelas del Distrito Escolar Independiente de El Paso.

Estudios sobre este tema nos indican que si un alumno es reprobado en primer año, la probabilidad de que abandone los estudios durante la adolescencia es my alta. Si se le reprueba una segunda vez, la probabilidad de abandono de estudios sube a un 90%. Uno de los objetivos de este programa (Focus on First Graders) es de reducir el número de niños reprobados ofreciendo a los alumnos y a sus familias una amplia variedad de servicios sociales y de tutoría. Nuestra intención es que estos servicios ayuden al niño a establecer una base académica bien cimentada desde los primeros años de escuela formal.

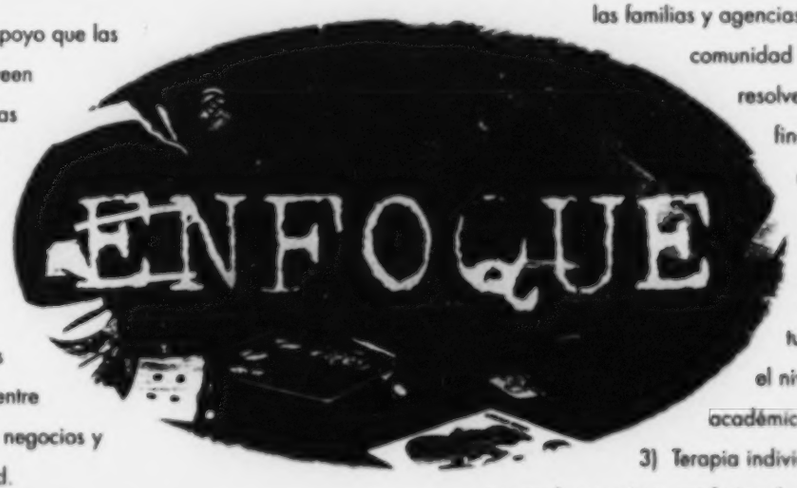
Metas

En Primaria

1. Incrementar los niveles de aptitud, auto-estima y éxito académico de los alumnos.
2. Ampliar y mejorar el acceso a los servicios sociales y de salud a los alumnos y a sus familias.
3. Reforzar el apoyo que las familias proveen para cubrir las necesidades de los hijos.
4. Desarrollar esfuerzos colaborativos importantes entre las escuelas, negocios y la comunidad.
5. Reducir el porcentaje de retención.

Meta A Largo Plazo

La meta a largo plazo del programa es, a través de una intervención temprana, aumentar al maximo el número de alumnos que se gradúan de escuelas preparatorias (high school), preparados para asistir a escuelas de educación superior (universidades y colegios) y para entrar a la fuerza de trabajo o al servicio militar.



Servicios

1) Especialistas en Intervención Familiar trabajan con las familias y agencias en la comunidad para ayudarles a resolver sus problemas financieros, médicos, familiares y sociales.

2) Programa de tutoría para elevar el nivel de desempeño académico.

3) Terapia individual y familiar a cargo de terapéutas profesionales.

4) Clases para padres que les ayudan a mejorar sus relaciones familiares y a aprender a participar activamente en la educación de sus hijos.

5) Excursiones para todos los niños de primer año de las escuelas que participan en el programa.

Resumen

La importancia de este programa es la colaboración entre el distrito escolar y las agencias de la comunidad para establecer un sistema integrado de servicios sociales y educativos que apoye a los niños y a sus familias dentro de la misma escuela a la que asisten.

El valor educativo del programa es que integra recursos ya existentes en la comunidad para afectar de manera positiva el logro académico de los niños. Se calcula que una de cada tres familias en El Paso están a riesgo de no poder proveer los servicios de apoyo que las familias necesitan. El acceso a estos recursos facilitará a estas familias el apoyo que sus hijos necesitan para lograr el éxito académico.

Para más información llame:

Focus on First Graders
499 Cabaret
El Paso, Texas 79912
(915) 587-5707
(915) 581-0917 (Fax)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE